CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   A file format for distributing media content from a server computer to a client computer in the form of a transfer file, the file format comprising:

a header section, said header section including media type information, bit rate information describing a bit rate at which a media asset plays out on the client computer, information indicating the time duration of the media asset, and size information for various portions of the transfer file; and

an asset metadata section, said asset metadata section including a source host name, a source asset identifier, and a value indicating a number of plays of the media asset can be played out on the client computer.

2.   The file format of Claim 1, further comprising media content, said media content including the media asset described by the header section and the asset metadata section.

3.   The file format of Claim 1, further comprising a signature that identifies the file format to a client computer.

4.   The file format of Claim 2, further comprising a signature that identifies the file format to a client computer.

5.   The file format of Claim 1, further comprising a user metadata section, said user metadata including information that can be presented to a user.

6.   The file format of Claim 2, further comprising a user metadata section, said user metadata including information that can be presented to a user.

7.   The file format of Claim 2, wherein the media content comprises a movie and the user metadata includes a director name, plot synopsis, and actor names.

- 14 -

8.   The file format of Claim 6, wherein the media content comprises a movie and the user metadata includes a director name, plot synopsis and actor names.

9.   The file format of Claim 2, wherein the media content is presented in an MPEG format and the header section specifies a fast forward/rewind file size.

10.   The file format of Claim 2, wherein the media content is presented in an MPEG format and the header section specifies an index file size.

11.   The file format of Claim 1, further comprising:

media content, said media content including the media asset described by the header section and the asset metadata section;

a signature that identifies the file format to a client computer;

a user metadata section, said user metadata including information that can be presented to a user;

the media content comprises a movie and the user metadata includes a director name, plot synopsis, and actor names; and

the media content is presented in an MPEG format and the header section specifies a fast forward/rewind file size.

12.   A server computer system for distributing media content to clients over a computer network, the server capable of connection to an asset metadata database containing metadata describing the media content, and a file system containing the media content, the server comprising:

an extractor module that assembles a transfer file containing the media content and metadata; and

a network connection capable of transmitting the transfer file to at least one client over the computer network.

13.   The server computer of Claim 7, wherein the media content is transmitted to the clients in a point-to-multipoint manner.

14.   The server computer of Claim 13, wherein said media content comprises video content.

15.   The server computer system of claim 12, wherein the asset metadata is used by a media player program on the client to process the media content and display the media content to a user.

16.   The server computer system of claim 12, wherein the server is capable of connecting to a user metadata database containing user metadata that is associated with the media content and is capable of being displayed to a user, and the extractor module copies the user metadata into the transfer file.

17.   The server computer system of Claim 12, wherein the media content includes a video object.

18.   The computer system of Claim 17, wherein the media content includes at least one GIF image accompanying the video object.

19.   The computer system of Claim 17, wherein the media content includes at least one html page accompanying the video object.

20.   A server computer system for distributing media content to client computer systems over a computer network in a point-to-multipoint manner, wherein the media content includes a video object accompanied by at least one static image, wherein the server is capable of connection to an asset metadata database containing asset metadata that is used by a media player on the client wherein the asset metadata describes the media content and the server computer system is capable of connection to a file system containing the media content, the server comprising:

an extractor module that assembles a transfer file containing the media content and metadata by writing asset metadata from the asset metadata database to the transfer file and by writing the media content from the file system to the transfer file; and

a network connection capable of transmitting the transfer file to at least one client over the computer network.

21. A client computer system for displaying media content to a user, the client computer comprising:

a media player program for decoding and displaying media content received over a computer network to a user;

a parser module for processing a transfer file received from a server computer, the transfer file including media content and related metadata, the parser module allocating resources on the client computer system in response to processing the received transfer file;

an installer module for storing various portions of the received transfer file on the client computer system; and

a network connection for receiving the transfer file over a computer network.

22. The client computer system of Claim 21, further comprising an asset metadata database, wherein the installer module stores the related metadata in the asset metadata database.

23. The client computer system of Claim 21, further comprising a file system, wherein the installer module stores the media content in the file system.

24. A method of performing content distribution between a server computer and a client computer communicating with each other across a computer network, wherein the server computer is capable of connection to a file system containing media content and an asset metadata database containing asset metadata describing the media content, the method comprising the steps of:

assembling a transfer file containing the media content and metadata by writing asset metadata from a asset metadata database to the transfer file and by writing the media content from the file system to the transfer file; and

transmitting the transfer file to at least one client over the computer network.

25. A method of performing content distribution between a server computer and a client computer communicating with each other across a computer network, wherein the client computer is capable of connection to a file system for storing media content and an asset metadata database for storing asset metadata describing the media content, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving a transfer file including a header that describes portions of the transfer file, media content and metadata describing the media content;

reading the header to determining sizes of portions of the transfer file;

allocating resources for the portions of the transfer file;

installing the metadata in the metadata database; and

installing the media content in the file system.

26. An electronic signal including digitally encoded data for distributing media content from a server computer to a client computer in the form of a digital signal encoding a transfer file, the digital signal comprising:

a first digital signal portion encoding a header section, said header section including media type information, bit rate information describing a bit rate at which a media asset plays out on the client computer, information indicating the time duration of the media asset, and size information for various portions of the transfer file; and

a second digital signal portion encoding an asset metadata section, said asset metadata section including a source host name, a source asset identifier, and a value indicating a number of plays of the media asset can be played out on the client computer.

27. The signal of Claim 26, further comprising a third digital signal portion encoding media content, said media content including the media asset described by the header section and the asset metadata section.